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A LETTER from HOLLAND,

TOUCHING

Liberty of Conscience, &c.

Dear SIR,

I Received yours of the 10th *Current* (*Stilo veteri*) and canot but *smile* to see you seem so much concern'd at the *Papers*, you say, are frequently transmited from hence; for I assure my self, you know the World better than to be really startled at such *petit efforts*: However, since you are pleas'd to *Command* (for under that Character I must ever receive the least Intimation of your desires) my mean Sentiments on that Subject, I shall deliver my Thoughts with all the *freedom* due to our *old Friendship*, and the Secrecy of a *Private Letter*, for such I hope your *Prudence* will make it, as fore-seeing how much it may otherwise redound to my *Prejudice* from some, that will neither *speak Truth* themselves, nor endure to *hear* it from others.

You are not ignorant that the *best Princes*, and even for their *best Actions*, have been traduc'd and scandaliz'd by *lavish Tongues*, the petulancy of *misemploy'd Wit*, and mercenary *malicious Pens*. Therefore the best advis'd *Statesmen*, have always thought such *Invectives* worthy none of their *passions*, but *scorn* and *neglect*; *Augustus* never spoke more like himself, than in that Expression to *Tiberius*—*Noli hac in re indagare, & nimium Indignari Quempiam esse qui de me loquatur Malè, satis est enim si hoc habemus, ne quis malè facere possit.*

I need not give you the Character of the *Instruments* that chiefly contrive and promote the *Libels* you complain of; What may not be expected from Persons *defeated* in their *Nefarious Attempts*? Frustrated of their *Ambitious hopes*? Acted by *Malice*, *Envy*, *Want* and *Despair*? I believe you never knew many of them much *Celebrated* at home for any extraordinary *strict Piety* or *Moral Vertue*; and I can assure you, we do not find by their general Conversation here, any great *Inclinations* they have to live *Saints*, or die *Martyrs*. What *Notorious false Stories*? What *gross Forgeries* (under the Notion of *Intercepted Letters*, &c.) have they not *Industriously* advanc'd and spread abroad? Nay, some of them have attempted to abuse Heaven it self, and suborn the *Stars* to Countenance their *Impostures*, whilst they divert themselves over a *full-crown'd Rummer*, in boasting how many silly Souls in *England* they have babled with these *sulsome Shams*—Yet these are the men that are so wonderously transported with

Zeal, for the Preservation of a *Religion*, which they always were, and continue to be a *scandal* to.

But if (over-looking their immodest *Reflections*, &c.) you consider the main scope and design of these *Papers*, is it not altogether to support the *Penal* and *Test-Laws*, and to prevent the free Exercise of *Religion* being *serled* among you? And on what *Topicks* do they proceed, but little *Sophisms*, adapted only to *Amuse* and *Inflame* the *Vulgar*? And begging the main Question, [viz. Taking it for granted, that if those *Laws* be removed, there will not, or cannot be other sufficient Security for the *Protestant Religion*, established in their stead] which as it is altogether a *mis-stating* of the case; so it seems somewhat *unaccountable*, that the very same Persons, who e'er while complain'd so much of *Oppression* for matters of *Religion*, or at least the fears on't, and were so found of *Liberty of Conscience*, that to obtain it, they broke through all the *Bounds of Duty* and *Prudence*, and ventur'd upon a desperate *Rebellion* (apparently threatening the utter Ruine of their *Native Country*) should now on a sudden be so extremely *averse thereunto*, when 'tis freely offer'd to be settled by Law to all *Posterity*, under as firm *Security* as the *Wisdom* of a *Nation* can invent?

Therefore, tho' I know Peoples *Passions* have a strange *Byass* on their *Judgments*, yet a *Wise Man* may be tempted to suspect something *more* in this case, and that the *Humour* is fomented and encouraged by the secret Influences of some *powerful Interest*; for 'tis That commonly moves the *Wheels*, though *Religion* may be made the pretence: What's the reason so many cry'd out against *Matchiavel*? Not so much perhaps, for the badness of his *Maxims* (since they are every day practis'd by such as declaim loudest against 'em) but ill Politicians were angry that he should divulge their *Arcana*, and make those *Mysteries common*, which they designed to engross to themselves for the support of their own *Grandeur*. I intend no more by the comparison, than only to say, That it is no *Miracle*, if one that finds some *Expedient* very *advantagious* to himself, shall endeavour to divert others from the use and benefit of it. Even the *Philosophick Adepti*, tho' they pretend to the most *Flaming Charity*, deliver their Precepts under such *perplexing Enigmata's*, as if they designed to lead men into *Errors*.

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and the destruction of their Fortunes, rather than illuminate them to the Discovery of the boasted *Elixir*. That Interest will not lie, is as certain as any Problem in *Euclid*; Nor is the Jealousie of State less violent than that of Love; none enduring a Rival to his Courtship, if he can prevent it.

Since therefore the bottom of your Enquiry seems to reach at this, what advantages a secure Establishment of Liberty for Tender Consciences in England may be attended with, in respect of the Trade and Civil Happiness of that Nation? And how far it may probably on that account Affect some of its Neighbours? I shall apply my self to give you the best satisfaction I can, wherein that I may not run into Notions merely speculative; I shall insist on matter of Fact; for what effects it has produced, it may do again (*cæteris paribus*) and much greater, if accompanied with other more advantageous Circumstances; Nor need I step out of my present Lodging for an Instance.

'Tis well known, that the free Exercise of Religion was the best Swadling-Band of this Infant Common-Wealth; for by their Original Constitution, the Union of Utrecht 1579, it was provided, "That every man should remain free in his Religion, and none be examined or entrapped for that Cause. And the steady adherence to that Maxim has mainly contributed to cherish and support them under all difficulties ever since, so that 'tis one of the Fundamental Principles of our Policy; the firmest Pile that bouys up our Magnificent Stadt-House." 'Tis That to which we owe our Populousness, and consequently our Trade, Riches and Strength; the Engine whereby we have at once Drained other Nations, and mounted our selves to such an Ascendent of Opulency and Power, as to vie with the most plentiful Kingdoms and tallest Monarchs.

And the Reasons thereof are no less Evident than Universal: For,

1. As Persecution tends to depopulate; so Liberty of Conscience naturally draws a vast Conflux of People; for as nothing can be more grievous to Honest Men, than to be restrained in this World from what they believe conducive to their Eternal Happiness in the next; so tho' all have not the Fortitude actually to suffer in such cases, yet few want the Prudence, if they have the opportunity, to remove to a place of shelter, where they may freely enjoy those Priviledges which they are denied at home; and for sake thereof, prefer Wildernesses and Boggs, before the most fertile Soils, or pleasantest Climates. Hence these Provinces (tho' little befriended by Nature) are so full of People, that they are Calculated to have at least six Souls for every Acre of Land.

2. The People thus kept at home, or invited from abroad, by publick permission of Liberty of Conscience,

are not idle Drones or Spend-Thrifts, but generally the most Sober and Industrious of any Countrey: None being more diligent in their Calling, or careful to husband their Time and Parts for publick Benefit and Improvement, than such as make Conscience of their Duty towards God; as knowing that Sloth, Gluttony, Drunkenness, Debauchery, Vainpastimes, or Trifling Diversions, are no less inconsistent with their Profession, than prejudicial to the Interest of any Nation.

3. Hence 'tis observed, That the most part of those Refugees consist of Merchants, Artificers, or Laborious Tradesmen, that like Bees, wherever they come, bring in Honey to the common Hive, by Teaching New, or improving Old Manufactures amongst those where they reside. How often has the grand staple of Trade been Transplanted from one place to another merely on this occasion? The French and English Persecutions about 130 years ago, carried it to Antwerp; the Fury of the Duke of Alva forced it into these parts, whereby Amsterdam from a poor Fishing Dorp, is raised to one of the Richest Cities in the Universe; the severity of some of your Clergy, about half a Century past, adding not a little thereunto.

Nor want there Instances of a fresher Date; 'tis not above four or five years since several Families from the West and other parts of England, harrassed and wearied out with Excommunications and Forfeitures of 20 l. per Month, for Nonconformity, &c. came and planted themselves amongst us at Lewarden in Friezland, and others went higher unto Lunenburgh, offering to set up the English Manufactory for Cloth, Stuffs, Sarges, &c. At both places they were entertained with all the Kindness imaginable; having Houses allotted them Gratis, and great Priviledges granted for their Encouragement. And more of their Countrymen after Monmouths Rebellion (a main ground of which, as we heard here, was pretended to be for Liberty of Conscience) flying over, and joyning with them, they became considerable; forty Looms at least, being daily kept going at Lewarden, and a Fund of 20 or 30 thousand Pounds proposed to be advanc'd for carrying on the work; whereby we promised our selves no small advantages; for what with Wool privately stoln from England, and what with another sort of some of our Upland Neighbours, and the plenty of Spanish Wool which we have here. They had got a knack of mixing it to as great advantage as yours; which skill our People would soon have been Masters of; and that could not fail of giving a fatal Blow to your Clothing Trade; and your Hamburgh Company began to fear, if not to feel the Consequences, especially from Lunenburgh, by reason of its Commodious Scituation to Intercept their Markets.

But

But the Truth is, the King of Great Britain was no sooner advertised hereof, but he dispatch'd necessary Orders to his *Ambassadour*, then at the *Hague*; by whose Directions, one *Everart* (or some such Name) was employed, to Treat with the *Principal Undertakers*, and by assuring them, of an intire *Liberty of Conscience* at home, and *Free Pardon* to such as wanted it, prevailed with them to withdraw their *Stocks*: And so the Design at both Places fell to the Ground; which though we may in *Interest* resent, yet none can but in *Justice*, applaude His Majesty's Conduct therein, as a Testimony of his Prudent Watchful Care, for the Welfare of his Kingdoms and People; who otherwise might have felt, the Ruinating Effects of this Accident, to after Generations.

On the other side, whereas till of late, we bought vast Quantities of *Druggets*, *Gawzes*, and other lesser *Manufactures* and *Knick-knacks* from *France*; since such Numbers of Protestants have been forced into these Provinces, from thence: We have made them here so plentifully, as to furnish the Markets, where there is Occasion: Nor is it probable, that *France* will ever recover that Trade again, whereby it got, perhaps more than a *Million per Annum*.

4. A Fourth Advantage of this Religious Liberty, is, That it encourages the Inhabitants of any Country, to be more *Industrious*, and more freely to venture their *Stocks* in Trade, being freed from Vexatious Prosecutions, Imprisonments, &c. And as (I have heard that) most of your Corporations in *England*, did not a little decline from their flourishing Condition some years since, when many of the sobrest, and most Publick-spirited Inhabitants, were by the Imposition of *Oaths* and *Tests*, debarred from all share in the Government; and by severe Prosecutions, forced to give over Trading: So the Influence thereof, we Apprehended, would have quickly affected the whole Nation, had not His Majesty's Wisdom interposed his late Declaration for Liberty; of which, (whatever Sentiments our Ministers of State may have of it) I doubt not, but you do already feel the *Happy Effects*, and would to a far greater Degree, if the same were once Establish'd by Law; and the Fears, Jealousies, and Distractions of Peoples Minds, fully Cured: For which, That seems to be the Sovereign Remedy, and only means, to make your King the *Great Arbitrer of Europe*. For,

5. Granting *Liberty of Conscience* secures the Government, and renders it easy; takes away all Colour for Faction or Rebellion: Nothing binds more firmly than Interest, and no Interest is more strongly obliging, or more beloved, than this Freedom; and therefore ties all the Inhabitants where they have it, into a strict Fidelity to that Power which grants it,

and brings every part to an intire Dependance thereon; whereas, when only *One Perswasion* is Carested, and others (altogether as good and useful Subjects) Exposed to Losses and Punishments, for their Religion; such a Government is seldom *Quiet*, and never *Safe*: Nor does it less appeale Feuds and Animosities, between the different *Setts*, amongst themselves; no man having Cause to be offended, at another Man's Liberty, because he enjoys the same himself.

The Happiness of these Provinces, in this Respect, I have seen *Elegantly Express'd*, by an Eminent Statesman of yours, formerly *Ambassadour* here.—*In this Common-Wealth* (says he) *no Man having Reason to complain of Oppression in Conscience, nor any Hopes, by advancing his Religion to form a Party, or break into the State, The Differences in Opinions, make none in Affections, and little in Conversation, where it serves but for Entertainment and Variety: They argue, without Interest or Anger; They differ, without Enmity or Scorn; and they agree without Confederacy: Men live together like Citizens of the World, associated by the common Tyes of Humanity, and Bonds of Peace, under the Impartial Protection of indifferent Laws; with equal Encouragement of all Art and Endustry, and equal Freedom of Speculation and Inquiry: The Power of Religion, where it is, lies in every Man's Heart; and where there is only the Appearance, it has not however so much of the Hypocrite, and nothing at all of that Fierceness, as elsewhere. But rather, is like a piece of Humanity, by which every one falls most into the Company, or Conversation of those, whose Customs and Humours, whose Talk and Disposition they like best. And as in other places, 'tis in every man's choice, with whom he will Eat or Lodge, with whom to go to Market, or to Court; so 'tis here, with whom he will Pray, or go to Church, or Associate in the Service and Worship of God; nor is any more Notice taken, or more Censure pass'd, of what every one chuses in these Cases, than in the other.*

I know not how relishing this Description may be to your coy *English Pallates*; but as I can assure you, 'tis perfectly true; so to me it seems very *inviting*, much accommodateto the Civil, Quiet, and Prosperity of any Nation; and (if I mistake not) is one of the greatest *Charms*, as well as chiefest *Supports*, of this Flourishing Republick.

Now, (to turn the Tables) if the free Exercise of Religion, have been able to yield such excellent Effects in *These Provinces*; who sees not that the same firmly Establish'd in *England*, must needs there produce far *Greater Advantages*?

For not to urge, that this Liberty is advanc'd amongst you, from a Nobler and more Christian Principle,

people, and so may hope for a greater share of the Divine Blessing: Ours owning its Birth, only to little Accidents and great Necessity, and continued for Policy and Reasons of State: Whereas, yours is the Child of Election, I mean, the choice of a well-informed National Judgment; drawn *Ex puris Naturalibus*, from the Limpid Streams of Primitive Christianity, Natural Equity, and Undisturbed Reason; Granted, not as a Conveniency, or an Alms, but a Right; not only, because fit in Prudence, but because requisite in Piety; nor so much for its Advantages, as its Justice: The contrary Practice being declared an Invasion on the Almighty's Prerogative, as well as a Tyranny over the Souls of Men. Omitting, I say, this more refined Consideration, I shall only offer, That you must needs, in meer Civil Advantages, weigh down the Ballance.

Because England is more aptly Scituate, and Accommodated for the same. For (if I may pour a bold Truth into the Bosom of a Friend) your happy Britain, as she is the Queen of Isles, so seems designed by Nature, to be the Sovereign of the Seas, Mistress of Trade, the Grand Magazine of Commerce, and chief Empory of the World, as Enjoying,

1. A most Excellent Temperate Air, with its Sweetness and Salubrity, inviting Strangers to a Climate, where they shall never need Stoves in the Winter, nor Grotto's in the Summer.

2. A large and Plentiful Soil, (England alone being Ten times as big as our United Netherlands) affording all things necessary, or commodious, for the Life or Delight of Man, and able to sustain many Hundred Thousands more of Inhabitants, than she has.

3. Furnish'd with divers Gallant Navigable Rivers abundance of safe Commodious Harbors, and bold strong Ports, (therein exceeding all her Neighbours, if not all the Countries in the World.)

4. Stock'd with more plenty of Native Commodities, and fit to be improved, into Useful and Venable Manufactures; so that none need want Employment, if they do not want Industry.

5. Extraordinary Plenty of Provisions, and those of the Best, and Heartiest, and most Substantial of your own Product: For I find it asserted, in Notitia Anglica, That there is yearly, as much Flesh and Beer

consumed in England, by over-plentiful Tables, as would serve Three-times the Number of People. Whereas, by Computation, these Provinces are not able of themselves, to yeild Sustainance for above one Eight part of our Multitudes; which, together with the Heavy Impositions to the State, renders all Necessaries dear, and living here, very uneasy and chargeable; your meanest Boors and Porters, Eating and Drinking better than our Burghers.

From these, and many other Advantages that might be Enumerated; 'tis easy to foresee, That if Liberty of Conscience should be once firmly settled in England, it cannot fail to Attract a wonderful Concourse of Strangers, thereby greatly advancing the Rents of Lands and Houses, and the Prices of all sorts of Provisions, and consequently, a mighty Increase of Manufactures, Trade and Riches.

After I have said thus much, I need not add who, or What People in the World, would find themselves losers on the Foot of the Account. It being morally certain, That Liberty of Conscience Establish'd by Law in England, (adding thereto an Act for Naturalization of Strangers, and a Registry for securing the Titles of Purchases, one of the greatest Defects in your Nation) would more mortifie them in seven yearstime, than a War so long managed against them, with Success. And if you are pleas'd to believe, that they have so much Wit, as to understand their own Interest, it will appear no wonder, if they make use of all the Arts they can, to prevent such Consequences.

Which, without the help of an Oedipus, may bid fair for the Salving the Riddle of your first Enquiry: But having wearied you with a Tedious Letter, 'tis time I beg your Pardon, and intreat you to take the Liberty I have used herein, as a further Argument; that I am altogether

Your most Humble,
and Affectionate
Servant,

Amsterdam, April
27. S. N. 1688.

C. D. W.

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